

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

Ellicott Creek Park offers a wide range of both active and passive recreational opportunities. The following is a listing of current park highlights:

- Administration/Maintenance Center
- 1 Lodge
- 7 Comfort Stations
- 2 Concession Stands
- Fishing access along two major Creeks
- Senior Center
- Approximately 34 picnic shelters
- 3 Footbridges
- Island area
- 3 Baseball / softball Diamonds
- 3 Tennis Courts
- 1 Soccer Field
- 1 Football Field
- Natural Ice Skating area
- Sledding Hill
- Bike Path
- Numerous Play structures and equipment

2.4 ELlicOTT CREEK PARK

DESCRIPTION

At 165 acres, Ellicott Creek Park is the smallest multi-purpose park in the county system, and is entirely within an urban environment setting. The park is centrally located and easily accessed by residents of Tonawanda, Amherst, Buffalo, and North Tonawanda (Niagara County), and is also a new destination along area bike routes, including the Ellicott Creek Bike Path (via the Town of Amherst), Erie Canalway Trail and nearby Riverwalk. It is one of the oldest four parks in the system, acquired by the County in 1925 due to its attractive landscape setting between Ellicott Creek and the Erie Canal (Tonawanda Creek). This beautiful “Heritage” park is noted for its impressive collection of old stone structures and waterfront setting. Ellicott Creek Park is generally flat, which was considered ideal for the development of many field sports and active recreation, such as tennis and ice-skating. The Park is situated between the Canal and Ellicott Creek, and is bisected by a major floodway corridor (spillway flume) between the two Creeks.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

No park in the system is more connected to the region’s historical development than Ellicott Creek Park. It was constructed along the banks of the historic Erie Canal. The majority of the original 40 acres was acquired through purchasing private land and County tax foreclosures (1936 & 1937). During the 1930s, WPA crews built the original stone structures and park features. Ellicott Island, A.K.A. “Island at Three-mile Bend” was constructed to make the creek more navigable and divert canal traffic. Charles Ellicott, a Landscape Architect, heavily influenced the island in the design process. The residential building boom of the 1930s and 1940s established Ellicott Creek Park as a mecca for boaters and family picnics.

The more recent decades of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s were not overly positive for Ellicott Creek Park. These were years of neglect and overgrowth, which tended to attract undesirable activities into the park. This led to a “less-than-positive” reputation for the park that was not very attractive for family picnics or conducive for comfortable outings in the park. However, beginning in the mid and late 1990s, Ellicott Creek Park saw a major resurgence in County attention, maintenance and care that has regained its positive standing

with the community. The Park now, once again, enjoys large crowds of people utilizing its many diverse recreational amenities.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Ellicott Creek Park is located in the northwest corner of Erie County along the shore of Tonawanda Creek, which also forms the boundary line with Niagara County. The park is entirely within an urban environment. The Park is strategically located between the Towns of Tonawanda, Amherst and City of North Tonawanda, and is less than 2 miles from the Towns of Wheatfield and Pendleton, as well as the City of Tonawanda. The University at Buffalo North Campus is situated only a few miles to the east, and is linked to the Park via the Ellicott Creek Bike Path (*7.2 Miles*). Proposed development of the Erie Canalway Trail along the banks of Tonawanda Creek (Erie Canal) will soon link Ellicott Creek Park to the Tonawanda Canal Development area, the Riverwalk and Isle View Park (along the Niagara River).

The area south of Ellicott Creek Park is heavily populated and densely developed, including the mega-commercial developments along busy Niagara Falls Boulevard, while the area to the north of the park into Niagara County still continues to grow with more residential and commercial development. Convenient access is provided to the park via numerous area roadways, with Niagara Falls Boulevard providing a direct linkage to the I-290 (Youngman Expressway), less than 2 miles south of the park. Residents of the Village of Kenmore and City of Buffalo can also easily utilize public transportation routes to access the Park. Creekside Drive cuts through the park along the Canal edge, while Ellicott Creek Road forms the southern border of the park

Most of Ellicott Creek Park lies within the Town of Tonawanda, with a small portion lying within the Town of Amherst. North Tonawanda (Niagara County) lies on the opposite side of the Tonawanda Creek that forms the western/northern boundary of the Park.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

Ellicott Creek Park has many diverse recreational facilities, and tends to be many things to many people. It offers both active and passive recreation opportunities. While beginning as more of a passive

NEARBY PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES

(WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)

Town of Tonawanda:

- Brighton Park and Golf Course
A 212 acre multi-sport complex
- Expressway Park
- Irvington Park
- Kenney Field
Includes a train caboose and phantom jet
- Lincoln Park
Ice-skating arena and pool complex
- Mang Park
Outdoor ice-skating pond and cultural/community buildings
- Sheridan Park and Golf Course
A 202 acre multi-sports park

City of Tonawanda:

- Collins Marine
A private marina with a boat launch and slips
- Long Point Park
Site of the Historic Long Homestead

Town of Amherst:

- Amherst Veteran's State Canal Park
Handicapped fishing access
- Ellicott Creek Bike Path
- Erie Canalway Trail
- Great Baehre Conservation Area
A 270 acre conservation area
- Great Baehre Conservation Area
- Audubon Recreation Complex
Includes the Pepsi Center and athletic fields
- Walton Woods Park
Popular hiking, biking, roller blading and cross-country ski park

City of North Tonawanda, Niagara County:

- Pinewoods Park
Beautiful park for family picnics
- Donald F. Miller Park
Private area for camping
- N.T. Audubon Nature Preserve
Buffalo Audubon Society's first nature sanctuary

oriented park with a boating and water-based theme, active recreational facilities were added to the park as the demand for these facilities grew strong. At one point, Ellicott Creek Park was one of the only parks of its kind around the area, and thus served the wholesale recreational needs of the public. However, the area surrounding the park has grown tremendously since the 1920s, and over the years, local Town parks began to be added and began to take the active recreational pressure away from Ellicott Creek Park. This is particularly true with Brighton Park, a Town of Tonawanda Park that is located less than a mile away, and offers numerous recreational facilities. Many other Tonawanda and Amherst Town parks also provide additional recreational amenities.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- *The park is showing deterioration in its older, historic stone structures*
- *There is a lack of directional and interpretive signage highlighting the wonderful park structures and natural features*
- *As resources and funding dwindle, a new strategy for lawn mowing needs to emerge. Currently, most of the open space in the park is mowed, including areas that are beyond the recreational use areas.*
- *Better linkages should be made within the park between the larger southern section and the northern "Island" area.*
- *There is an apparent underutilization of some of the park facilities,*
- *There are numerous outdated play structures that do not meet current safety or accessibility codes.*

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS

- *Installed one playground and many new grills*
- *Made all new concrete tables for area shelters*
- *Removed old playground equipment*
- *Repaired one foot bridge*
- *Dredged the canal / inlet in back of casino building (along Ellicott Creek) - put in new retaining wall - installed new canoe launch - built new patio in back of casino and installed blacktop around building.*

- *Made repairs to roads on island*
- *Repairing / upgrading the restrooms at the Maple Grove restrooms*
- *Repairing restrooms at the casino*
- *New roofs for casino, superintendent's house and 3 shelters*
- *Install additional playground equipment*

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

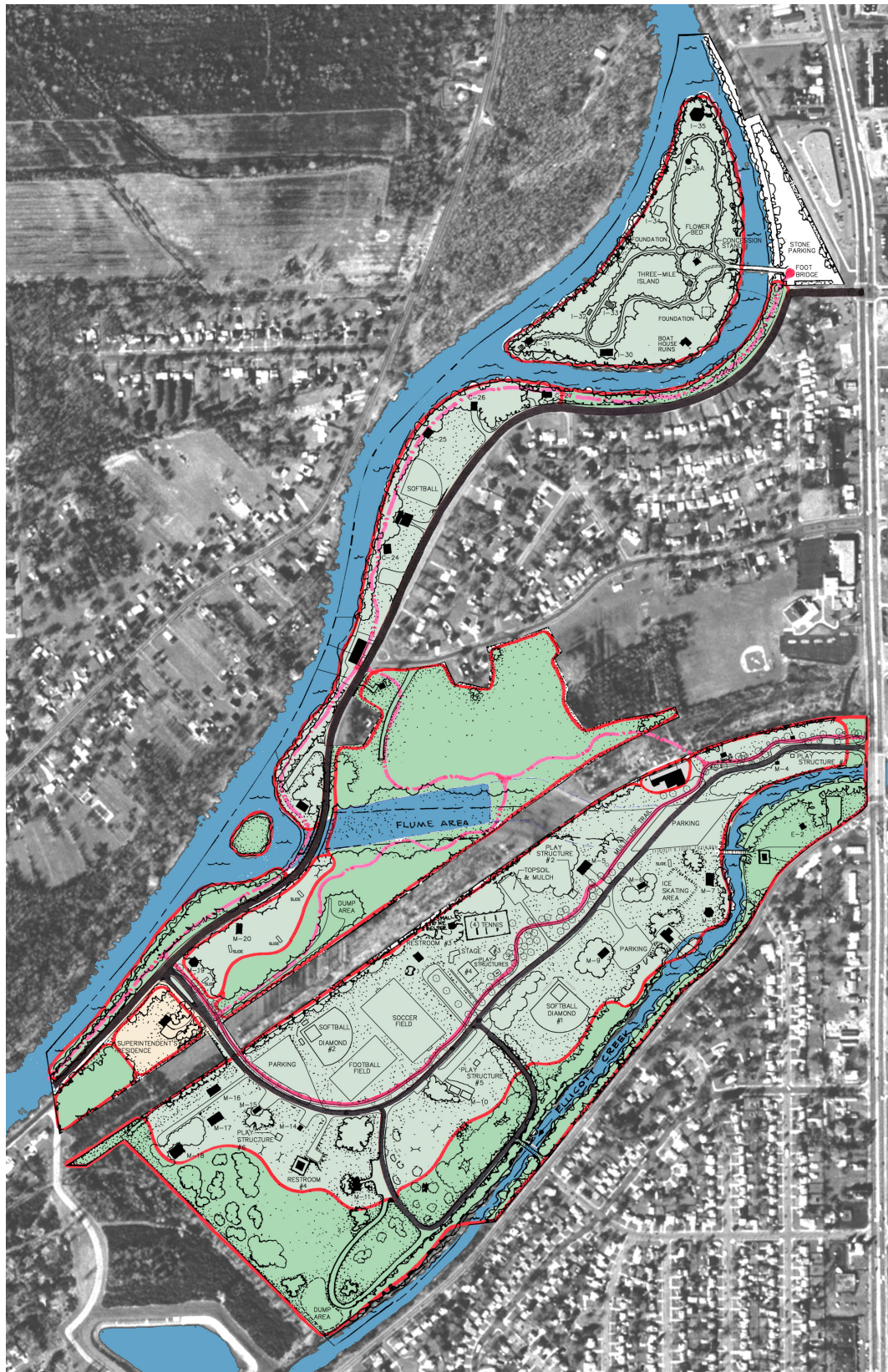
- *Ellicott Creek Park needs to better maximize its potential of containing nearly 10,000 feet of shoreline along Tonawanda Creek, a mile of which is along the navigable channel of the Erie Barge Canal. Although the park receives heavy use, most of the park's activity is not waterfront related. Such ideas would include:*
 - *Improving Boating and Fishing access, and enhancing areas for viewing the creeks/canal*
 - *Realizing the potential of the proposed Erie Canalway Trail from near the Amherst Museum through the park to the Riverwalk system*
 - *Promoting the "heritage" and recreational relationship between the park and the Erie Canal through visual connections and overlooks, as well as a series of interpretive signs and historical markers.*
- *Preserve and enhance park Heritage Areas and structures; i.e. original landscape settings, unique stone shelters and structures, boat house ruins, etc.*
 - *Restore old stone picnic shelters and structures before building new picnic shelters and structures. (Consider the heritage "value" of these old park features for future tourism and visitor appreciation). Consider park for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places.*
- *Further enhance and restore the casino/boathouse on Ellicott Creek into multi-purpose facility with boathouse. Boatlaunch utilized for canoes and kayaks (non-motorized). Include Heritage Parks Visitor Information area / Concession building; The County recently completed an in-house improvement project to revitalize the boat launch and casino facility. The canal was dredged and new decking installed to revitalize this facility - a major success and cost savings for the County. Also consider providing a new (motorized) boat launch off the parking lot at a point west of the former/ original launch site.*

- *Improve conditions of parking lot at northern end of park; establish a better connection and visibility from Niagara Falls Boulevard. This is one of the few parks, and few specific locations, in the entire system where an asphalt-surfaced parking lot would likely be appropriate.*
- *Establish new public boat launch site at the northern end of the parking lot with direct access to the Erie Canal. Redesign existing parking lot to accommodate boat trailer parking.*
- *Consider use of “Island” boathouse (“castle”) ruins for non-motorized boat launch, with potential Erie Canal Interpretation area;*
 - *Support a proposal to dredge the shallow waters around Ellicott Island (original creek alignment) to improve water flows and to open up new recreational opportunities for paddle-boats, canoes, etc.*
- *Establish and implement park reforestation plan on Ellicott Island to ensure preservation of impressive tree canopy; (Large Existing Cottonwoods/Poplars are nearing their growth potential.) The island has many characteristics similar to that of an “Olmsted Park,” yet the island has seen much degradation and neglect over the years.*
- *Reinstate creek riparian zones through establishment of mowing limits, re-naturalization;*
- *Establish water’s edge trail systems with viewing areas. Support and promote Erie Canalway Trail with future western connections to Isle View Park and Riverwalk. Promote the existing trail connection through the park and to the Ellicott Creek Bike Trail system through the Town of Amherst.*
 - *Provide ADA access to important and scenic vista locations.*
- *Restore or reconstruct the various pedestrian bridges that connect to the community. These important linkages tie the park to its neighborhood users.*
- *Establish a stronger linkage between Ellicott Creek Park and the adjacent Irvington Town Park.*
- *Establish a stronger linkage between Ellicott Creek Park and the businesses along Niagara Falls Boulevard,, St. Christopher’s Church, etc. through new sidewalks and trails, streetscape enhancements, wayfinding signage, maps, etc.;*

- *Establish more dominant “gateway” features for the park at points along Niagara Falls Boulevard.*
- *Provide new interpretive signage and informational kiosks that tie the park better “into the mix” with other local cultural and historical attractions.*
 - *Provide an interpretive “story-line” for the Park’s history, i.e. How and when the park was developed?; What is the history of the Erie Canal through this area?; When was the flood control system established?; What’s the history behind the 3-mile island? What were some significant historic happenings in the area, or in the park?; When were the old stone structures built?; etc.*
 - *Provide interpretive signs or markers at key historic and natural sites, such as at the site of the old boathouse, etc.*
 - *Consider offering local business establishments the opportunity to provide information that would cater to park users and offer a stronger linkage to the community.*
- *Promote the proposed recreational trail system along the Erie Canal / Tonawanda Creek, including new interpretive signage*
- *Consider a “Corporate Sponsorship” program which encourages local businesses and organizations to get more involved with the Park, including sponsoring certain events, restoring older facilities and park features, setting up an interpretive signage program, selling snacks in the park, etc.*
- *Improve pedestrian safety and visibility along main road(s), particularly the trail crossing at Niagara Falls Boulevard*
- *Improve fishing access and opportunities to the edge of the canal and creek (s). This also includes the inner pond area within the Ellicott Creek floodway zone.*
- *Reduce lawn mowing to provide more natural setting in non-use areas, and help to shift park maintenance towards restoring older park structures. One significant area to begin the naturalization process would be along the perimeter at the south section of the park.*
- *“Open up” the wooded area in the center of the park to new opportunities for trails and nature education and interpretation.*
- *Continue to provide new tree plantings throughout the*

park, particularly along the roadway edges. New native plantings could be introduced to provide future perimeter buffers and enhanced wildlife habitat.

- Improve playground facilities throughout the park. Remove and replace oldest, non-compliant structures with newer equipment. Consider earthtone colors in the Heritage park setting rather than bright, primary colors.*



Legend

- Nature Reserve Zone
- Recreation Zone
- Heritage Zone
- Service Zone
- Zone Boundary

Nature Reserve Zones

Includes significant natural features or areas that require management to ensure the long-term protection of the natural heritage, i.e. woodlands, wetlands, natural open space areas (meadows), waterways, ravines, gorges and escarpment faces, steep slopes, etc.

Recreation Zones

(Active and Passive)

Includes the 'maintained' landscape areas of the parks in which facilities development is permitted to support low to moderate intensity recreation activities, i.e. sports fields, specialized activities, picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, etc.

Heritage Zones

Includes areas of significant cultural heritage or archaeological features that require management to ensure the preservation of these important heritage assets.

Service Zones

Includes maintenance and service areas for the developed parks, as well as access points or staging areas within the Conservation Parks (e.g. trailheads and parking lots) where minimal use facilities are needed to support allowable uses within the Nature Reserve Zone.



Ellicott Creek Park MANAGEMENT ZONES

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

- S Short Term *(1 - 3 years)*
- M Mid Term *(4 - 10 years)*
- L Long Term *(11 - 20+ years)*
- O Ongoing *(Continuing Efforts each year)*